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Not to Destroy but to fulfil
A Baccalaureate Sermon



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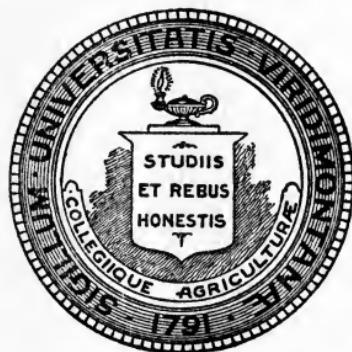
Not to Destroy but to Fulfil

A Baccalaureate Sermon

By

M. H. BUCKHAM

President of the University of Vermont



LII 56³⁷
1906

Sermon

"I came not to destroy but to fulfil."—Matt. v. 17.



N. the northeast coast of Scotland stood in the sixteenth century one of those stately Gothic cathedrals which were the contributions of Christian faith to the Christianity of their age. It was of vast dimensions, fitly embodying the national spirit of worship when Scotland was a great nation. It had nave and aisles, transept and choir, groined arches and foliated capitals: it had rood-screen, and tabernacles, and niches filled with figures of patriarchs, apostles, and martyrs, such as the piety of those ages had approved. But there came a time, and a spirit, and a man, hostile to what all these things were supposed to stand for, and on a certain day, amid a vast concourse of the people, a fulmination went forth from the Cathedral pulpit which roused the passions of the crowd to such a fury for destruction that in a few hours one of the most imposing cathedrals

seems to attack abuses. It is a bid for popularity which rarely fails of more or less success. The demagogue knows this and counts upon it. Newspapers—some newspapers—thrive upon it. Have you some scandal to air; would you assail some reputation; attack some man in high place; assault some institution in good standing; you may have a large place in “our crowded columns.” But still the fault-finder, the accuser, the procurator-general for society, is useful. Too much praise of good men and good institutions, too much admiration of things as they are, would induce indolent content, and would result in stagnation and reaction. If only these image-breakers knew what images should not be destroyed, and if they had the courage, and the ability, to make sure that in spite of clamor and demagogism they be not destroyed! If John Knox could but have stopped that destruction when it had reached due bounds; if those virtuous and amiable Girondists could have stayed the French revolution within the safe limits they would have chosen; if Pym and Hampden and Falkland could have recovered the liberties of Englishmen without letting loose a band of fanatics who destroyed liberty faster than it was gained, how much better had it been for France, for England, for Scotland! for law, for liberty, for

religion ! But, alas, that is just where destructive reform shows its weakness. Anybody can start an iconoclastic fury—not even John Knox could stay it. Anybody can start a run on a perfectly sound bank—it takes financial skill to quiet it. Jack Cade can start a great social riot; a small vine grower can raise a rebellion that throws France into a turmoil ; but to bring back peace and order requires a statesman. If men ever get so far with their inventions as to be able to raise storms and tempests in the heavens, the harder task will be to quell the storms they have raised. It is a perilous thing to have dealings with the destructive forces of nature—or of society. Reflection comes haltingly into the arena when the conflict is on : repentance comes too late.

I came, said Jesus, not to destroy, but to fulfil. It would seem that if Jesus were the reformer he is sometimes thought to have been, if his method and secret was to discard all that was, and to begin all over again, there never was a better time for that method. Abuses were abundant, and shameless, and defiant. What an awful story of human corruption, individual and social, is set forth by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans ! If we did not know, we should have said, that a divinely commissioned reformer

of mankind in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, would have made short work of every institution known to men. Preachers often tell us what Jesus would do if he came to Chicago, or San Francisco, or Paris, and they always imply that he would not leave one stone upon another of the moral, social, and political fabric. He would overturn, and overturn, and overturn, till society was like the debris of St. Andrew's Cathedral. But we know that whatever he would do, this he certainly would not do. He came not to destroy but to fulfil. He came to seek out the good that is in essential humanity, the humanity which was his own—and which he believed in—to seek it out, to discover it to itself, to encourage it, to revivify it, to fulfil it, till by infusing his own divine energy into it, he should enable it to overcome, overmaster, dominate and finally expel and annul the evil and all its belongings and accessories. He was in fact so patient in the midst of abuses and wrongs, he used so little of the destructive forces at his command, that men of the reforming temper are apt to be disappointed with a certain amiable weakness which they think they discover in him. So slow are we to discern power, except when power asserts its presence by violence—not seeing that violence is a manifestation of weakness and not of strength—of force which soon spends

itself and lapses—in contrast with the calm, sustained, continuous potency which has time and eternity at its command.

The history of mankind seems to show that, from time to time, under the workings of evolution, or, which is the same thing, under the leadings of divine Providence, great social changes are due and must come. When the time is ripe for any such change, the great question is, whether it shall come normally, by a process of fulfillment, or abnormally by a process of destruction and restoration. Is social progress necessarily violent and wasteful? Is it necessary to destroy a magnificent cathedral with all its embodied history, and its aids to true worship, in order to utter a protest against some abuse which a more patient zeal might correct?

May it not be well for us at a time when we seem to be threatened with social changes more or less revolutionary, when the most popular measures are the most startling, when men are outbidding each other for popular favor by out-clamoring each other for changes which upset and disintegrate long established principles and institutions, may it not be worth while to cool and quiet our minds by looking for a little into the other method—the method which aims to accomplish its work not by destroying but by

fulfilling—the method in accordance with which

I. In the first place we seek motive and inspiration rather from the possible good which is before us than from the evil which is behind us. Anger against wrong does not furnish so good a motive as enthusiasm for the right. Indignation may be a sharp stimulus, but it is not a sure guide. It is safer to steer by a star in front than by a smoke in the rear. What the world is always wanting, certainly always needing, is more appreciation, more admiration, more inspiration. There is a place in the world of ideas, and in the social world, for the satirist, but to have too much of him, or too many of him, is to get distorted and morbid views of things. I could name a widely read newspaper on which to be a constant proof reader would endanger not only good temper, but sanity. More if possible than even a poet, a reformer needs imagination—a sane and wideviewing imagination. True reformers are poets, or as we call them, Utopians, men who have visions of what is desirable, and can make it desired and persuade men that it is feasible. How to preserve St. Andrew's Cathedral from desecration and, by well ordered and magnificent worship, make it tributary to the greater glory of God and the elevation of man's heart and life—what a triumph had that been for

a Scottish reformer! How to make the human temple more glorious without and within—how to build together the varieties of human abilities and aptitudes into an organism which would at once perfect the parts and complete the whole—how to utilize the immense wealth-producing power of our civilization so as to make it an accumulation of energies waiting and willing to be sublimated and spiritualized—how much better than the repressive and vindictive measures which destroy and do not fulfil! Waste is not merely the wanton destruction of values which exist; it is also, and more effectually, the prevention of values which might be. To induce in society a general feeling of timidity, of apprehension, a dread of what may come next, is as bad, it may be a thousand times worse, than actual destruction by fire, or flood, or earthquake. To paralyze the agencies which make for good is the most fatal and widespread destruction. Hope and not terror, good promised rather than evil doomed, a fair prospect rather than an escaped gloom, these are what quicken the pulse and warm the heart and give the zest and inspiration which make progress at once safe and continuous and permanent.

II. The movements, secondly, which fulfil without needless destruction, are characterized

by a fine and comprehensive sense of justice. A fine sense of justice, I say, because an ordinary, rough and ready, well-meaning but unintelligent sense of justice in these difficult and complex matters, may work more wrong than that which it sets about remedying. A police justice in a great city will decide a dozen or a score of cases in an hour, and decide them with an average degree of fairness, by applying first one and then the other of the two polar maxims—to “assume innocence till guilt is proved,” and to “let no guilty man escape.” But in great social affairs this extempore justicing will not do. It is too rude, too impulsive, too temperamental to be entrusted with the decision of questions involving great and high and far reaching interests of communities and nations. The justice which alone meets the needs of problems such as arise in our time and people, is a justice which is comparable to the scales in a chemical laboratory, which weigh the thousandth part of a gramme—a fine, discerning justice—not subtle, not losing itself in fractional distinctions, but always sensitive, always clear-eyed, always true to the shekel of the sanctuary. But it is equally important that the sense of justice be comprehensive—that it take into its view all the interests involved in the question before it. A spirit of right-doing, or

right-judging, if it is narrow and one-sided, is liable to issue in gross wrong and incalculable mischief, and all the more so in proportion as it is honest and intense. When a surgeon sets about excising an ulcer he takes into account all the rest of the body and sees to it, so far as he can, that the healthy part does not suffer from the operation. I suppose it will be conceded that nine-tenths of all the business done in the United States is honest business, including therein the work of the professions, in law, medicine, divinity and literature. If this is so, surely it is bad policy and bad morals to do justice upon the one-tenth peccant part so as to punish most severely the nine-tenths honest and honorable business. The justice which punishes, which destroys, is of course necessary, but it overvalues itself—is overvalued—in comparison with the justice which protects, defends, relieves, or indemnifies. Ordinary human nature does not enjoy a white assize: it wants to see punishments inflicted: that is its test of the court's efficiency. In the parlance of old New England to justify a man was to punish him. In our time we want at least one corporation indicted and one condemned every day—and it seems to make no matter if all the innocent ones are punished also. There is abroad a kind of Herodian vengeance against all industrial

agencies. As the surest way in King Herod's mind for getting rid of one dangerous child was to kill all the children,—so in order to punish a few corrupt corporations, let us strangle all corporate enterprises. In order to punish the modicum of ill-gotten and ill-used wealth, let us minimize all wealth-producing agencies. There is no justice so essentially unjust, as an indiscriminating justice, a justice which with eyes bandaged smites, and sees not, and cares not, what it smites. In saying this I am not disparaging our courts of justice—they in my judgment are our last refuge from the ambition of executives and the precipitancy of legislatures, from the tyranny of mobs, and organizations. I am speaking of the justice—or the injustice—which finds expression in popular verdicts, extrajudicial judgments, incendiary harangues, and all that mass of pronouncements on public affairs which, like the cry of “On to Richmond,” are pushing the public officials into attitudes which are bordering on frenzy, and which threaten to demolish and destroy some of the costly fabrics of our civilization.

III. And, again, the progress which moves on with the least possible destruction is actuated by good will and not by ill will, by love and not by hate. One of the characteristics of Charity as

described by St. Paul is that it rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. It does not gloat over the discovery of foulness and wrong and evil, but delights in finding what is fair and wholesome and good. There is a psychologic truth of large meaning involved in the phrase "the will to believe." The real inwardness of character is more revealed by what it wills to believe, than by what it expressly believes. Indeed a man really believes only what he wills to believe. Note the way in which the same fact coming with the same evidence is received by different men. Is it some crime or scandal? One man is loath to believe it—cannot believe it—will not believe it—does not believe it: another is eager to believe it—and believes it. Is it some surprisingly great and good action? "Incredible," says one man. "There is some sinister—some depreciating fact or motive hidden somewhere." The man of another mind says exultingly, "It is just the fine and noble act which I expected from such a man!" Charity rejoices not in iniquity—hopeth and believeth all good things. That was a beautiful word indicative of a beautiful spirit which the Greek poet put into the mouth of Antigone—"My nature is to love with those who love, not to hate with those who hate." In this avowal the Greek virgin anticipi-

pated the spirit of Jesus himself: "I came not to destroy, but to fulfil." His was not the spirit which suspects and gets its greatest pleasure in seeking out evil, and destroying it even when this needs to be done. To hunt out the evil in human life—in human institutions—to destroy it—to excise it—to topple it down—that may be a good work or it may not be. It may be well to let the tares grow with the wheat; to trust to inward forces of vitality to expel the imposthume; to let the sculptured saint remain to teach us a real kind of sacred history; to purify corporate industry rather than to throttle it; to moralize wealth rather than to prevent it. But surely, to find the good anywhere and everywhere, to encourage it into vigor and mastery, to find the nucleus and norm of an institution and nourish its true interest and spirit, to clear away from it the evil that stifles it, and do any destroying that may be called for carefully and patiently, but to get the chief satisfaction and joy in seeing and helping the good to grow and bud and blossom and bear fruit—that is the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of all good and lasting work in and for mankind. Let who will glory in destruction, and waste, in the discomfiture of craft and graft: we will rejoice rather when truth is discovered and will join in its eureka: we will applaud when good men

come to the front and the high places are filled with men of unpurchasable virtue ; when health and manly vigor and womanly beauty are becoming the prevailing marks of our race ; when the competent are becoming rich and the poor are becoming competent and only the paupers are poor ; when we see more and more the spirit of universal peace prevailing over the spirit of dissension and war ; when amid all the glamours of a luxurious civilization, and all the falsehoods and shams which would here and now, if ever in history, justify iconoclasm, our people, the people of this United States, of all sections and creeds, still give their hearts' admiration and love to the things that are lovely and pure and of good report.

In all this there is one fundamental question to settle—is our civilization essentially a Christian civilization—not in all its details—that we know it is not—but essentially? Christianity has been a social force for nearly two thousand years. Are the foundations rightly laid? Or must we destroy the whole fabric, and lay other foundations, and call in Fourier and Proudhon, and Tolstoi and Karl Marx and Lassalle, to lay better foundations for a new social order? Not if we believe that human evolution and divine Providence are one and the same, working along

the same lines to the same end, different names for the same agency. We have already enough history of Christian civilization to make prophecy easy. The task before the great Christian nations is not to destroy but to fulfil ; to destroy only the dead and decaying branches in order that the trees may have fuller opportunity of growth ; to topple down and replace the age-worn and crumbling buttresses, and dislodge the hideous gargoyle and leering demons, and not disturb the praying apostle and the sleeping saint : to make not suspicion, jealousy, envy, hate, the principle and motive forces of social, economic and political life, but religion, the spirit of Christ, law, freedom, brotherhood, love—the righteousness that exalted a nation, and cannot endure but must punish and destroy, all iniquity, whatsoever loveth and maketh a lie,—yes—but—controlling and animating, restoring and empowering all, the justice which strikes when it must, but would rather spare than smite, and the charity which suffereth long and is kind, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity but in the truth, believeth, endureth, hopeth all things.

Members of the Graduating Classes :

There is never a more hopeful time, and never a more dangerous time, than when the people take in hand seriously the

vital questions which concern the body social and the body politic. And such a time is this time. The time is hopeful because amid profound and widespread restlessness, both the mind and the heart of the people are believed to be sound—without any bias toward wrong thinking or wrong doing in any direction. It is a dangerous time, because the questions before us are so far reaching that serious mistakes would entail a long and formidable train of evils upon our own and succeeding generations. The problems are fundamental, and the results for good or evil will depend on whether the issues are met fundamentally or superficially. The debate is not between conservatism and radicalism—both principles will be in demand and both will enter into the settlement—it is rather between destroying and fulfilling, between methods of getting rid of evil and installing and maintaining the good. The present danger is that the people, because of certain flagrant wrongs, will punish themselves vindictively, and will make this retributive and punitive mood permanent in laws and institutions. It is no uncommon thing for an individual to be so awed and cowed by some unusual revelation of evil as to go bowed and humbled all his days, his nerve lost, his faith, hope and charity irrevocably gone. From such a danger, understood and

foreseen, the brave man will rouse himself, and like the patriarch Job will stand up and assert his own integrity and that of the system of things. Society in our country is just now facing this danger. It is to guard you against it that I have spoken as I have to-day. You have come to full manhood and womanhood in a time of general condemnation. There are many who tell you that business is fraudulent—that politics are corrupt—that wealth is ill-gotten and ill-spent—that social life is demoralized—that the besom of destruction must go through our whole social order before we can begin to be in right relations one with another. I warn you against coming under the spell of this spirit of ill will, of suspicion, of depression. I would rally you to the ranks of the reformers—for our age certainly needs reforms—but to those who would reform by fulfillment rather than by destruction. In every profession and calling there are new truths waiting to be discovered, new methods to be put in operation, old truths and methods not yet half realized. There is unbounded wealth before you which may be as honestly got and as rightly spent, as were the meagre returns of labor in former times. For a while doubtless the good people of San Francisco must give their main energies to the extermination of plunderers. But the reason why one

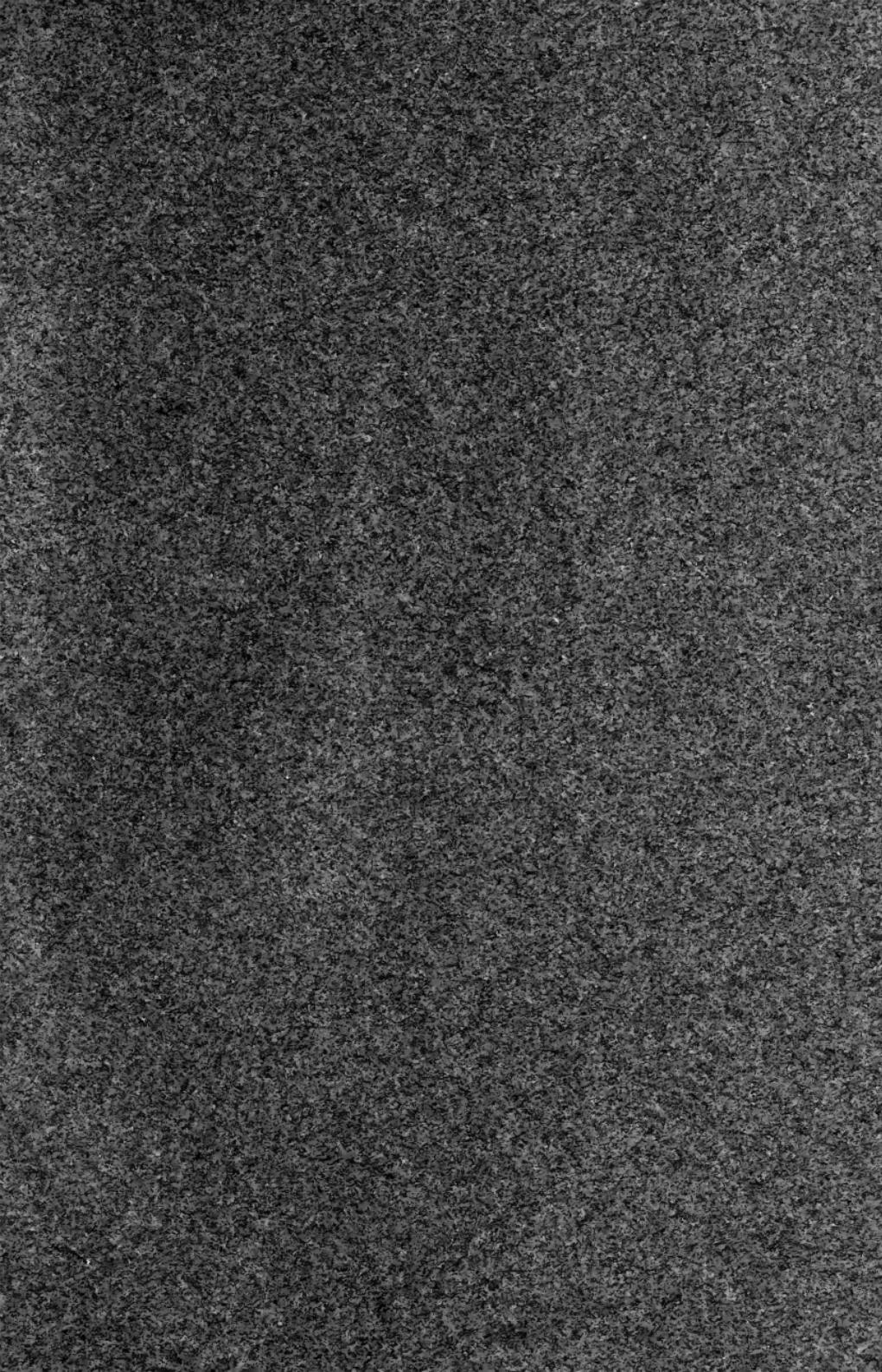
should want to live in San Francisco is not to police it, but to build up a transcendently beautiful city. Nature in her wild and wayward mood came to destroy—it will be the glory of man to fulfil. In this respect San Francisco is a type of the whole world of civilized mankind. St. Andrew's Cathedral will never be rebuilt—San Francisco will be. It is more glorious to build than to destroy.

But I must not dismiss you in this our last meeting together, without saying a few words which will be less individual, more what the entire body of your instructors would wish me to say for them. The sum of it would be that they have put their best of toil and love into you, into your minds and characters, in the confident hope that in so doing they have done a good work not for you only, but for ends higher than those which affect either you or themselves—work which will make for the health of many communities; for the prosperity of many industries; for the prevalence of justice in many districts and circuits; for good instruction in many schools; for love and happiness in many homes; for the maintenance of true religion in many churches. The rewards of this our academic life are not in money, or in what money will buy, but in what you and such as you are, as compared with what you were

when you came into our hands—and still more in what you will be and will do hereafter. When one of you shall hereafter do a fine thing in your calling or in your life—even though it be not so great a thing—if it is a fine thing, something worthy of a scholar, and a gentleman or a gentle-woman and a Christian, it ought to add to your own joy to think that it will bring special delight to some one of your old professors: and he, on his part, will get one of the supreme joys of his life in thinking—perhaps he cannot in his exultation keep from saying—“I taught him, or her, to do that!” And so God be with you in your callings, your public services, your struggles, your triumphs, your homes, your whole lives, till you come back to tell of them to each other, and to us, in the many, many happy and fruitful years to come which we hope and pray may be yours.







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